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SPELLJAMMER™

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THE ROGUE SHIP: 3

By Kesel, Collins & Panosian

MOTHER OF SONGS ONCE TOLD ME I WOULD LEAVE MY WORLD, RETURNING TO IT WITH THE SECRET OF **SPELLJAMMING**, GUIDING SHIPS BETWEEN WORLDS.

OH, NO.

WHAT IS IT?

A NEOGI SHIP'S ON OUR TAIL.

WHEN FATE CAST **THIS** SHIP UPON MY WORLD, I THOUGHT THE MOTHER'S SONG HAD COME TRUE AND I WOULD LEAVE WITH IT.

INSTEAD, THE SHIP LEAPED WILDLY TO THE SKY, **STEALING** ME AND MANY **OTHERS** OF MY TRIBE.

ADD TO THAT THE SKYFUL OF SHIPS AHEAD OF US, AND WE'RE PINNED!

MEREDITH, OUR CAPTAIN, PUSHES HERSELF TO RETURN THE PRIEST PAX TO HIS HOMEWORLD, UNIPAXALA, AFTER WHICH SHE PROMISED TO TAKE US HOME. THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED.

I AM KIRSTIG, CALLED ELDER OF THE PEOPLE OF SONG AND STORY. I FEAR ALL OUR SONGS WILL END SOON.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

<FATHER OF TALES!>

<ARE WE GOING TO DIE?>

<I PRAY NOT, YOUNGLING.>

<NOT SO FAR FROM HOME.>

RUMBLERRRRRRRRRRE

THE NEOGI'LL HAVE TO GET PAST *ME* BEFORE THEY...

...THEY--

--NOTHING!

THERE'S NOTHING OUT HERE!

THEN WHAT'S CAUSING ALL THE SHAKING ON THE *INSIDE*?

OOOOOHH...

WOW.

THE SHIP *CHANGED SHAPE!*

I THINK WE'VE FOUND A WAY OUT.

<FEELS AS THOUGH THE WALLS ARE BEING BATTERED DOWN!>

MEREDITH, ARE WE BEING ATTACKED AGAIN?

WE *CAN'T* BE, KIRSTIG--THERE'S *NOTHING* CLOSE ENOUGH TO BOARD US!

I'LL CHECK OUTSIDE!

EEEEEEKKKKEEEEEEESH

THE ROGUE SHIP

PART 3

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GUESS WHAT, MEREDITH!

YOUR SHIP'S A *SHAPECHANGER!*

NOW WE CAN GET OUR LITTLE SELVES OUT OF HERE!

NO. THEY'LL NOTICE A DESERTER, BUT THEY WON'T NOTICE *ANOTHER* SHIP JOINING THEM ON THE ASTEROID.

BUT RETURNING PAX DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN *YOUR* LIVES, KIRSTIG. I CAN SEAL YOU AND YOUR TRIBE IN PROTECTIVE SHELLS ON AN ASTEROID.

AND IF YOU ARE UNSUCCESSFUL, WHO WOULD RETURN FOR US?

<THE MAGICIAN HAS OFFERED TO PLACE US IN SAFETY, BUT I WOULD DECLINE HER OFFER-->

<*NO!* BETTER TO DIE AWARE THAN BE SEALED AWAY LIKE CORPSES!>

COUNT ME OUT TOO, MEREDITH. I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF...

...UNLIKE *SOME* PEOPLE.

THEN WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

SHIP, GO.

SO FAR, SO GOOD.

WHERE SHALL I LAND, PAX?

FOLLOW THE TERMINUS LINE TO THE BORDER BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

THE PROTECTIVE ICE RING PROJECTOR IS IN THE TOWER'S CENTRAL CHAMBER.

KEEP US IN THE DARK HALF NOW.

OUR ASTRONOMERS WATCH FOR UNWELCOME VISITORS. THEY SHOULD HAVE SEEN US...

...I WONDER WHAT WENT WRONG.

SO... DO I LEAVE THE CROWN HERE OR TAKE IT?

WHY NOT PUT IT IN THE HIDEY-HOLE WITH YOUR OTHER TREASURE?

THE EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL CHAMBER WON'T OPEN OUT HERE, JASMINE.

I KNEW YOUR PARENTS WOULD GUARD IT FOR ME, SO I TIED IT CLOSELY TO TORIL...

...AND I WANTED THEM TO HAVE MY STASH IF I DIDN'T RETURN.

HMPFH.

HOW *DID* THEY DIE, JASMINE?

DOESN'T MATTER *NOW*, DOES IT?

WHAT *MATTERS* IS THAT WE'VE JUST LOST ACCESS TO LOTS OF VALUABLE STUFF!

IT'S ONLY *STUFF*.

I STILL HAVE MY MAGIC, AND THAT'S WHAT GOT ME ALL THAT *STUFF* IN THE FIRST PLACE.

"STUFF" PEOPLE *DIED* FOR.

I'M NOT TAKING THIS ALONG. WEBBING IT TO THE WALL WILL KEEP IT OUT OF *CURIOUS* HANDS...

WHA--?

--SHIP... DID IT BY... *ITSELF!*

SAVES ME A SPELL...

...I JUST HOPE YOU PLAN TO GIVE IT BACK WHEN I RETURN, LITTLE SHIP.

<I THINK WE SHOULD STAY AND GUARD THE SHIP.>

<BUT WHAT IF THE CAPTAIN'S KILLED?>

PAX, ARE THERE ANY PATHWAYS, TUNNELS, ANYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT THE NEOGI WON'T?

YES...

THE WAY EVERYONE IGNORES ME--

--WHY NOT JUST TELL ME TO MY FACE I'M *USELESS*?

IT'S NOT *MY* FAULT I CAN'T DO MAGIC. CAN I HELP IT IF THE PEACE NEVER CONTACTED *ME*?

<IF THE OTHERS DON'T RETURN, I THINK I COULD GET THE SHIP TO "SPEAK" WITH ME.>

<BUT WILL IT KNOW HOW TO TAKE US HOME?>

<KIRSTIG-- THEY'VE LEFT THE BOY OUT OF THEIR TRIBE CIRCLE!>

<LET'S INCLUDE HIM IN OURS.>

TEMBER?

KEEP THEM SAFE, TEMBER --WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU!

ARE WE LIKELY TO RUN ACROSS ANYTHING OTHER THAN UMBER HULKS?

NO, THEY'RE THE NEOGI'S PERSONAL SLAVES: STRONG, BRAINLESS AND PREDICTABLE.

I'VE GOT JUST THE THING, THEN.

THE POISON'S ENOUGH TO TURN EVEN UMBER HULKS GREEN!

DON'T WORRY, PAX--THEY'LL JUST *SLEEP*, NOT DIE.

I AVOID VIOLENCE, SHE *REVELS* IN IT.

LIFE HAS TAUGHT JASMINE TO *REACT*, BUT NOT TO *REFLECT*.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD AMONG CHILDREN WHO THINK THIS WAY?

AND IF THE POISON DOESN'T GET THEM, *THESE* WILL!

MY WINGS CHANGED TO SOMETHING REALLY *USEFUL* THIS TIME!

KRAAAK

SO, PAX, HOW COME YOUR PEOPLE DIDN'T FIGHT?

IF THEY SHOWED A LITTLE *SPIRIT*, THEY WOULDN'T BE--

MY PEOPLE REVERE *PEACE*.

THIS LIFE IS A *TEST* TO SEE IF WE CAN OPERATE ON A *HIGHER* LEVEL BEFORE WE JOIN THE GODS.

THE BEST OF US HELP OTHERS RISE AS WELL.

WAR MAKES ANIMALS OF MEN AND RUINS OF EMPIRES.

MANIC HEROES MAKE FOR EXCITING *STORIES*, BUT THEY ARE BAD TEACHERS.

OKAY, *OKAY*!

I WAS JUST WONDERING...

...BUT SPEAKING OF SELF-SACRIFICE, WHY DIDN'T YOUR PEOPLE ACTIVATE THEIR DEFENSES?

I DON'T KNOW.

THEY WERE EITHER OVERCOME BY SURPRISE AND SPEED--

--OR WE HAVE A TRAITOR WITHIN.

THERE ARE UMBER HULKS AT THE BATTLEMENTS, SO WE CAN ASSUME THE NEOGI CONTROL THE TOWER.

CAN *YOU* SEE ANY OF THAT, PAX?

NO...

...BUT THERE *SHOULD* BE SENTRIES ALONG THE WALL.

WE'LL BE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE IN THE INNER COURTYARD.

WE'RE FAR FROM *DEFENSELESS*, PAX.

KEEP WATCH, TEMBER, BECAUSE *GNATS* MIGHT TRY TO BOARD!

AND FURTHERMORE, TEMBER, MY BOY, YOU ARE SO INCREDIBLY *USELESS* THAT WE'LL JUST FORGET YOU EXIST!

YOU CAN *ROT* ON THAT SHIP, FOR ALL *WE* CARE!

ENGYAH!

WE'RE GOING TO SAVE UNIPAXALA, BUT *YOU* GET TO BABYSIT!

HEY, LITTLE GUY...

...YOU'VE DECIDED TO *LIKE* ME?

GOOD, THAT MAKES *ONE* FRIEND.

WANNA PLAY SPELL-JAMMER?

WHOOOOSH! THROUGH THE SKY!

HIS NAME'S AKSEL.

WHOOOOOSH! AND THE SHIP'S NAME IS AKSEL!

AK--

--SHIP'S NAME IS--

YOU SPOKE *COMMON*!

OF COURSE! WE SPOKE THE TALE OF TONGUES!

OH...

YOU MEAN YOU'VE UNDERSTOOD US ALL ALONG?

YES, BUT KIRSTIG THOUGHT WE SHOULD KEEP IT A SECRET. PLEASE DON'T TELL I'VE TOLD...

I WON'T, I GUESS...

I'M NOT ANGRY, MERIE.

IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT TEMBER CAN SPEAK WITH *ALL* OF US.

JASMINE, DO YOU STILL HAVE THE SCROLL?

GOOD! REMEMBER, YOU ONLY HAVE TO TEAR THE SCROLL AND THE SPELL WILL ACTIVATE.

MAKING ME LOOK LIKE AN UMBER HULK. MY DREAM COME TRUE!

I'D RATHER JUST FLY OUT OF REACH INSTEAD.

JUST IN CASE, JASMINE. *PREPARATION* IS *VALUABLE*.

YOUR PEOPLE ARE PROVING THAT RIGHT NOW, AREN'T THEY?

ALL CLEAR. THEY HAVE *NO IDEA* WE'RE HERE.

SHHHH! LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY.

CLIK

IF WE'RE LUCKY, THE NEOGI WON'T HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE MAZE OF PASSAGEWAYS AND TRAPS THROUGH THE TOWER.

LIGHT.

WHICH WAY TO THE PROJECTOR?

PAX?

PAX?

EH?

OH, MY APOLOGIES. I WAS LOST IN MEMORY...

...LAST TIME I WAS DOWN HERE I WAS TEMBER'S AGE AND FORBIDDEN TO EXPLORE THE TUNNELS.

PERHAPS THERE'S HOPE FOR THE BOY YET.

COME...

THIS BRANCH WILL PROVIDE US WITH A VIEW OF THE CENTRAL CHAMBER AND THE PROJECTOR.

THERE IT IS!

AND THERE ARE THE NEOGI!

THE NEOGI HAVE TAKEN THE TOWER-- THE ICE RINGS WON'T DO UNIPAXALA ANY GOOD *NOW.*

NONSENSE. IT'LL KEEP THOSE WHO ARE IN *IN* AND THOSE WHO ARE OUT *OUT.*

OH, SURE! EASY! AFTER ALL, THERE'RE *THREE* OF US!

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POTENTIAL, JASMINE.

SO STANDS, IT *IS*, OUR OFFER. IF, TO *BE*, ROBED BIPEDS RETURN SHIP STOLEN FROM US, WE WILL ONLY *HALF* YOUR POPULATION KEEP!

IF, IT *IS*, OUR PROPERTY IS *NOT* RETURNED, THEN, TO *BE, ALL* WILL BE *KILLED!*

SO YOU'RE OFFERING ME THE POSSIBILITY OF SAVING *HALF* OUR POPULATION?

EEEEEE!

TERMS OF NEGOTIATION OFTEN, IT *IS*, REST IN *POSITION* AND *STRENGTH, HUMAN.*

<HUSH ANXIOUS NOISE!>

<HAVE NO *INTENTION* OF LETTING HALF GO!>

<COOPERATION WILL AID FEEDING THE GREAT OLD MASTER EFFICIENTLY!>

NOW...

HALF OR *ALL?*

WHICH, TO *BE*, SHALL YOU CHOOSE?

MURDERERS!

PAX... HOW DOES THE PROJECTOR WORK?

JUST BREAK THE CRYSTAL. A SPELL SUCH AS--

I'LL DO IT!

WAIT!

YOU CAN ONLY BREAK IT BY MAGIC OR THE HAMMER!

SHE CAN'T HEAR ME!

TOO LATE. THE NEOGI CAN SEE HER. AND *US*. WE HAVE TO GET OFF THIS BALCONY.

PROTECTION FROM EVIL

MEREDITH --BRING HER BACK!

NO.

I WILL *NOT* STAND BY AND LET YOU SACRIFICE THE GIRL!

THIS ONE I CAN *SAVE!*

YOU CAN'T STOP ME NOW, UGLY! I'M TOO *LUCKY* AND TOO *CLOSE!*

NOW WE CRACK THE CRYSTAL, EASY AS TOSSING A HALFLING AND TWICE AS USEFUL--

KRAK

EEEYOW!

RRRRONK!

OOOOOHHH...

WHY DO I HAVE THE SINKING FEELING MY LUCK'S *CHANGED?*

BACK OFF, UGLY ...YOU'RE *NOT* MY TYPE!

I MAY NOT LEAD A CHARMED LIFE, BUT I'M *NOT* HELPLESS!

I'M NOT--

WHUD

FIRST YOUR CREWMEN, NOW JASMINE-- *DESERTING* YOUR *ALLIES* SEEMS TO BE SOMETHING YOU'RE VERY QUICK TO DO!

I LIVE MY LIFE AS I SEE FIT. SOMETIMES YOU *LOSE* PEOPLE ALONG THE WAY...

...IF YOU WERE *MY* AGE, YOU'D UNDERSTAND.

I *AM* YOUR AGE AND I FIND *NO* SENSE IN IT!

YOU'RE HARDLY *MY* AGE!--

--BESIDES, THE GIRL ISN'T LOST YET.

THE NEOGI KEEP THEIR FOOD FRESH FOR SOME TIME BEFORE... *PROCESSING.*

WE'LL HAVE TIME TO GET HER BACK ...IF WE STAY *ALIVE* AND *UNCAPTURED!*

IF YOU WEREN'T SUCH A POMPOUS ASS, YOU'D--

I'D *WHAT*? BE LIKE *YOU*?

NO, I'LL NOT DROP *MY* STANDARDS, MEREDITH.

MEREDITH!

SUSPICIOUS, AS ALWAYS.

AIR WALK

FLIGHT

RATHER A *LETHAL* TRAP FOR SUCH A *BENIGN* PEOPLE, ISN'T IT?

IT'S NOT A *TRAP*, IT'S A *WASTE PIT.*

SMELLS MORE LIKE A *TRAP.*

PAX--

--IT'S GIVEN ME AN IDEA... THE CRYSTAL'S MOUNTED ON A *PEDESTAL.*

IS THERE A WAY *UNDER* IT?

YES, WE TAKE THIS STAIRWAY --

PAX! THEN IT'S *TRUE* --YOU *HAVE* RETURNED!

LUCK IS WITH US!

FAITH SHOWS US THE WAY!

NOW WHAT? WE COULD CRACK THE BASE AND LET THE CRYSTAL FALL, THAT'D BREAK IT...

NO, THE CRYSTAL MUST STAY ALIGNED WITH THE PROJECTOR. WE'LL HAVE TO GO UP.

IF WE REMOVE ONE OF THE BASE'S PANELS, WE CAN ACTIVATE IT...

NO, PAX. THERE WILL BE *NO* SAVING UNIPAXALA.

SEREN!

SURPRISED? WELCOME HOME, PAX.

IT'S NOT A PLEASANT HOMECOMING, SEREN.

WHY? BECAUSE YOUR *LIES* HAVE BEEN EXPOSED?

YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS FARCE COULDN'T LAST!

SEREN, LISTEN TO ME. THE NEOGI--

NO!

NO MORE LIES!

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS UNIVERSAL PEACE!

THE PEACE WE SEEK IS ON THE NEXT LEVEL, AND WHAT BETTER WAY TO ACHIEVE IT THAN ALL TOGETHER?

AND WHAT SURER WAY THAN TO INVITE A NEOGI RAID?

ONLY I WAS BRAVE ENOUGH TO DO IT! THE DAY IS HERE, PAX--REJOICE!

UNIVERSAL PEACE... COURTESY OF THE NEOGI!

SEREN, YOU IDIOT! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'VE DONE? DO YOU--

SEE? EVEN YOU HAVE LOST THE WAY.

WE ARE NOT PEACEFUL CREATURES, PAX.

WELL, I WILL NOT GIVE UP MY BELIEF!

BY THE PEACE THAT FOSTERS STRENGTH OF WILL, DELIVER US FROM THIS DARK DAY-- SEND US AID TO OVERCOME THIS EVIL!

YOU WORSHIP THE PEACE YOUR WAY, PAX...

...AND I MINE!

NO!

THE ONLY UNIVERSAL PEACE, PAX-- IS *DEATH*.

NOOOOOOOOOO!

PRISMATIC SPHERE

SEREN! MEREDITH, YOU MUST --

IF YOU THINK I'M WASTING *MY* MAGIC TO SAVE THAT MADWOMAN --

WHUD

A *CURIOSITY*! SLAVES, *ATTEND*, YOU *WILL* TO THE *INTRUDER*!

STEPHEN KING'S

GRAVEYARD SHIFT

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